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WORKS

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THE ART OF PLASTIC CHAIR SITTING: THE FIRST STEP OF HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGNING

By Alexis Marquez, Local Works Field Specialist

In most rural communities, despite the growing interest of community based organizations along the Dominican-Haitian border to initiate locally led programs, there are technical, organizational, and communication barriers to access aid. The Local Works Dominican Republic team has set out to develop an Access to Aid Workshop that meets community based organizations' needs, but also remains human-centered throughout the entire design process. To build empathy for the organizations', Local Works Dominican Republic intends to reach, Alexis Marquez, a Local Works Field Specialist who is a Return Peace Corps Volunteer, was selected to head the design process. "In most rural communities along the Dominican-Haitian border one will find an opportunity for extensive field research in the form of a monoblock chair that is lightweight, stackable and most commonly white," said Marquez, an expert in plastic chair sitting "Dominican culture is communal and socially active, where the best way to get to know your neighbor is over a cup of coffee on the front porch relaxing in a plastic chair."

Marquez conducted 16 interviews with community based organizations, national, and international non-governmental organizations, and the private sector in the southern border region asking about their perceived barriers to aid for local organizations. Marquez's experience as a returning Peace Corps volunteer and current field visits to other southern region communities allowed her to immerse herself in the daily lives of community based organizations and deeply understand their needs and aspirations for community development. With every sitting pivot in a plastic chair, Marquez was able to collect thoughts from community leaders, review what she already knew as a volunteer, define what she didn't know, and review barriers. Human-centered design is founded on spending quality time with people to gain insight about and inspiration from the communities being designed for. But a plastic chair sitting to connect with community members requires practice and preparation. "The only organizations we have had any kind of success with getting funding or donations in kind were the ones who visited the community and sat down with families in their home, visited the church or school," said Yonei Feliz Cuevas, Batey 9 community leader.

Before beginning the inspiration phase of the Human-Centered Design process, Marquez contacted community based organizations from her Peace Corps volunteer service and asked for their network of other organizations in the region and contacts in the private sector. Interviews with these institutions gave Marquez the locally led perspective, while conversations with non-governmental organizations and the private sector gave the donor point of view. Logistics were focused on small, intimate settings where a plastic chair could be used to create a trusted atmosphere between the interviewee and Marquez. After the interviews, Marquez reorganized the data collected to verify 14 identified barriers to aid with the top five as follows: lack of

Upcoming Events

Access to Aid Learning Community

Backbone Montecristi Training

Whole System in the Room -
Montecristi



**For More Information, Please
Contact the Santo Domingo
Local Works Team:**

santodomingolocalworksteam
@usaid.gov

Also, visit us at:

<https://www.usaid.gov/local-works>

Or Please Contact:

Elizabeth Conklin
Technical Advisor
econklin@usaid.gov

Nadia Laforet Gauthier,
Local Works Field Coordinator
nlaforetgauthier@usaid.gov

awareness of resources, a desire for soliciting skills, a need for networking, a demand for technology and technological literacy, and political distrust. “Interviews with local actors were natural and by the quality of information I was able to receive I could tell the trust between the interviewee and myself was strong,” said Marquez. “In the inspiration phase of human-centered design, the magic is in the plastic chair.” Local Works Dominican Republic is committed to designing an Access-to-Aid Course that builds local, organizational capacity, models access to aid practices and cultivates learning communities to empower local actors in their pursuit of sustainable community development.



7 VIDEO FILMING TIPS LOCAL WORKS DR LEARNED FROM CONDUCTING THE ACCESS TO AID COURSE ONLINE

By Alexis Marquez, Local Works Field Specialist



Does COVID-19 have you in front of a camera more than ever before? USAID’s Local Works Dominican Republic understands the adjustment and wants to share seven amazing tips picked up from shifting our in-person Access to Aid Course to a virtual platform. Like many institutions and agencies across the world, USAID/Local Works Dominican Republic has had to make program changes to fit the new circumstances under the pandemic to still serve its target audience.

After 6 months of researching, developing content and presentations, USAID/ Dominican Republic Local Works decided to use the Google Classroom platform to reach community-based organizations accompanied with a set of vlogs to give participants a visual and personalized experience. A set of 10 vlogs were prepared to discuss five foundations of establishing a strong organization and the fundamentals necessary to access aid. For those of you who are conducting virtual programming, or want to feel more confident in front of the camera, these tips are for you!

First steps

The first step, like any presentation, is to break the ice with the camera by relaxing and getting used to seeing yourself on screen. It can be helpful to have the camera on while you’re completing some of your pre-meeting routine like sipping on coffee, reviewing notes or adjusting yourself into a comfortable position in your chair. When filming, do not feel pressure to turn on the record button right away and dive in immediately. After you get comfortable with yourself and the camera, it is time to bring energy to better engage with your audience. The simple act of smiling can get you into a positive mood ready to shine on camera. “Before recording, I like to listen to classical music while I review my notes and enjoy a nice piping hot herbal tea,” advises Alexis Marquez, Local Works Field Specialist.

To keep your audience engaged, amp up the energy by being a little more outgoing than usual, but not to the point of being ingenuine. “To find the right energy level, I recorded myself in a regular tone and a slightly more energetic one to see which is best for my audience,” says Marquez. It’s okay to feel a little “over the top” because once you review the film you will see how your presence translates on screen.

Being on camera is not a spontaneous event and there is some preparation beforehand to make sure everything you want to communicate comes out well. Outlining your talking points to have readily available while filming or on a call is one of the best methods to communicating all your key points. To take your camera presence to the next level, it might be helpful to watch your favorite broadcasters and/or television personalities to study their body language and delivery. “Sometimes we need to observe the pros to get a sense of how to deliver our own personality in front of the camera. Finding entertainers that you relate to are key to getting good examples to model after in your own recordings,” suggests Marquez.

Improving by practice

The only way to improve is through practice by making a multitude of videos that you are not necessarily going to publish. “Think of these as your rough drafts of filming and they are meant to improve your delivery, but not necessarily be the finished product,” says Marquez. When presenting on film, there is so much self-assessing and a video diary might be a good approach to get used to articulating your thoughts. Local Works has found that practicing, reviewing, accessing and making tweeks to better one’s performance on screen is the best process. Also, selfie videos on your Instagram story are great practice because the relationship you cultivate with your phone is the same as your camera. “Instagram stories are great because it helps reduce camera shyness and you can poll your friends to see how you did or ask where you can improve,” advises Marquez. Improving delivery on camera is a process and everytime you record it's one step closer to achieving your best recording. We are experiencing trying times that call for alternative communication methods and to keep our relationships strong we need to utilize mediums that are captivating. “Aside from the constraints of the pandemic and the obstacles we face serving our community partners, video is a great way to engage rural communities,” said Marquez. “It is a medium that includes visual and audio communication to reach diverse learning styles,” said Marquez.

“MEET THE COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR DOMINICAN YOUTH”

By Alexis Marquez, Local Works Field Specialist



Three community based organizations from the southern Dominican-Haitian border region were selected by the USAID Dominican Republic Local Works Program to pilot the Access to Aid Course. Each organization was interviewed and consulted on their perceived barriers to aid for grassroots organizations seeking funding to improve their communities. After conducting a modified Organizational Capacity Assessment, the USAID/Dominican Republic Local Works team was able to select three youth-run community based organizations who work in animal husbandry, eco-tourism, and youth development. Field Specialist, Alexis Marquez, a Return Peace Corps Volunteer, had met with two of the organizations as a volunteer in the south. The Local Works team is proud to present the amazing groups it is working closely with and supporting on their journey to self-reliance. These organizations are ASODEICO, San Rafael Surf School and Fundación Paso Joven (Youth Steps Foundation).

Supporting economic stability

About a five hour bus ride from Santo Domingo, lies a community of Dominican-Haitian people who come from a long line of immigrant sugarcane workers. This tight-knit community has a bright group of dedicated youth who are seeking to introduce new economic opportunities for other youth aspiring to achieve economic stability. Batey 4 is home to ASOIDECO, a community based organization founded in 2011 with the help of World Vision and FEDA, with the mission to eradicate generational poverty by developing economic opportunities for youth and give them skills that are transferable to the workforce. ASOIDECO's vision is to enter the agriculture business by building a goat farm that has a diverse portfolio in the meat and dairy industry. They hope to become an example of successful rural business development and opportunity for surrounding bateys in the area and help them lead their community development. In addition to economic development, ASOIDECO wants to support and invest in primary school education to eradicate child labor by proting the importance of attendane. "This association was developed with the intention to inspire other Batey's in the sugarcane region to help increase sustainable economic opportunities," said Antonio Octavis, ASOIDECO President.



Surfing the waves of hope

Approximately one hour from Batey 4 is San Rafael, a beautiful ocean front community with water as blue as the larimar jewelry they sell in the region. This breathtaking town is home to the San Rafael Surf School, a business started by a youth member of the community with assistance of a community economic development Peace Corps Volunteer. Since this community based organization opened, it has won multiple business awards in the region and has expanded to tours and hospitality. The founder of this organization is also a member of the Dominican Republic Olympic Surf Committee and hopes to make San Rafael a surf destination in the south. Eager to develop San Rafael's eco-tourism, the San Rafael Surf School wants to develop youth job skills by providing training and employment as tour guides and larimar jewelry makers. They want to keep the economic development opportunities local and teach residents how to take care of the beach to keep it as a beautiful attraction for domestic and international tourists. "I want to create opportunities in my community and develop an ecotourism destination in the southern border region to minimize the amount of youth that have to leave San Rafael to find employment and give them the skills they need to be self-sufficient," said Raylin David Romero Feliz, Founder and President of the San Rafael Surf School.



Building a brighter future step by step

About three hours further south, lies the province of Pedernales tucked along the Dominican-Haitian border with a desert-like coastal landscape. Fundación Paso Joven, an all female youth lead community based organization, is located here and has more than 75 young members. This organization has partnerships with the Dominican Women's Ministry, the Womens Association (Asociación Mujer), an international partnership with the Girls First Fund and an informal working relationship with PLAN International in Barahona. Paso Joven's mission is to provide adolescents, specifically girls and young women, in the province informational workshops pertaining to sexual and reproductive health education in addition to life skills. Under a new government, tourism will be further developed in the southern border region and Paso Joven wants prepare youth for the implications of tourism in regard to child sex trafficking. To combat this epidemic, Paso Joven is developing a program to prepare girls and young women to empower themselves, build character, establish leadership skills, gain experience in entrepreneurship and become engaged citizens. Paso Joven wants to develop the next generation of female leaders by assuring they get the opportunity to explore all their options as adolescents. "As an organization that is housed on the border, we intend to develop bi-national programming in favor of boys, girls, and young adults from all communities," said Lludy Terrero, Founder and President of Fundación Paso Joven.





santodomingolocalworksteam@usaid.gov
<https://www.usaid.gov/local-works>